Chapter 6 Education and the Virtues

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For universities to be seats of learning they must be schools of virtue. This is a necessary condition for their work, if they are in any way committed to the exploration of truth for the sake of the common good.

My exploration of this claim will begin with an explicitly theological account of learning, drawn from a passage in the epistle to the Ephesians that connects 'learning Christ' to a set of deep behavioural dispositions – the kind of dispositions that are named elsewhere in scripture as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This connection between Christian learning and the fruit of the Spirit is, I will suggest, echoed in a relationship already widely acknowledged in discussions of higher education: the relationship between university learning and virtue. I will argue that Christians might therefore have a role to play, alongside others, in defending and promoting the virtues necessary to learning: the virtues that sustain engagement with the world and with other learners. I also argue, however, that we should not imagine that universities have ever achieved a settled embodiment of virtue, nor see Christians simply as defenders or promoters of patterns of virtuous practice already securely understood and possessed. Rather, the

virtuous practices needed for good university learning are still in the process of being discovered, and Christian participants in university life need to be teachable participants in the quest for more virtuous learning.

Learning Christ

> Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of impurity.
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> That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
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> Ephesians 4:17–24 (NRSV)

In this passage from Ephesians, understanding and living go together. The ‘Gentiles’ live badly because they understand badly;

their disordered minds are incapable of guiding well-ordered lives. To live well requires well-ordered understanding, and well-ordered understanding involves a transformation of the self. It demands a purification of disordered desires, a change in pattern of life from impurity to holiness, a taking off of the old self and a putting on of a new.

The old way of life, precisely insofar as it is driven by misdirected desire, is a life bound to misunderstanding. It is a life in which understanding is yoked to gratification, and so to delusion – because our responsibilities and opportunities can only appear in distorted form when viewed through the filter of the old self's avarice. The possibilities open to the old self are drastically limited, narrowed down to a blunt calculus of cost and benefit, insensitive to anything that does not tip the balance of that calculation. To live in this way is to live with a darkened mind: a mind almost blind, because it has such a dim light by which to see. It is also to live with a futile mind, a mind left purposeless because it cannot make sense of the world against any horizon more distant than its own passing wishes. This is understanding alienated from God, the 'Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all', the one truly righteous and holy.

True understanding involves the overcoming of this alienation from the life of God. It is inseparable from holiness because it involves

purification of vision from gratification's myopia, and learning to see as God sees. It is inseparable from righteousness because it learns to see justly – to do justice to what it sees. It demands everything of those who would learn it, because it demands the painful stripping away of their old habits of mind: dying to the old self and rising to the new. The way to renewal of mind is the way of cross and resurrection, the way of Jesus Christ. It is under his tutelage that Christians are being taught to see afresh, as they are being reunited in him to the life of God. They learn *about* him, and they are taught *in* him; the passage from old self to new, from delusion to the renewal of their minds, takes place as they learn Christ.

The pursuit of understanding in the likeness of God does not, however, lead to a 'God's-eye view', possessed in grand isolation by an individual knower. It is a form of understanding that cannot be pursued alone, as the epistle had indicated a few verses earlier:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift…. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for

> building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.
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> Ephesians 4: 4–7, 11–16

Learning Christ – walking on the way of Christ, and growing up into the full stature of Christ – involves becoming the *body* of Christ. This learning takes place as each person learns to play a distinctive role within the body. Each person has received a distinctive gift and *becomes* a distinctive gift to the whole. And that does not mean that each person is apportioned one fixed duty, being assigned to a single category in some divine team-building exercise. Rather, each is given a gift 'according to the measure of Christ's gift', and that measure, 'the measure of the full stature of Christ', is one of unstinting abundance, into which the members of the body grow together. Each

member learns to understand more and to give more to the body, the more that he or she receives from others in the body.

To come to the full stature of Christ, each person must therefore learn to receive and to go on receiving the gifts of others, which means learning to avoid any teaching (any 'wind of doctrine') that prevents such learning: any teaching that shows us only how this community might grow according to some faction's pre-conceived scheme. Learning to recognize and to receive the gifts of others, and to discover together the life that all can share, means learning to receive a life that no individual or faction owns, that comes to them all (and keeps coming to them all) as a gift from above: the gift of a steady enlargement of their capacity to live together in love. Growing into God's understanding means unending reception of understanding from others, and through them from Christ, not the possession of a perspective from which to see and judge all.

The body's growth into the life of understanding requires each member to speak the truth in love, where the truth in question is precisely the yield of an undarkened vision, a renewed mind, capable of seeing justly. It requires each member to speak from the mind that is growing in her or him with the putting off of the old self and the putting on of the new. To speak the truth in love is to speak in ways that reveal possibilities of mutual service, of ministration to one

another's needs within this body. This does not mean, however, that 'truth' is simply a name for whatever is serviceable to this community, whatever promotes its unity and security over against the 'Gentiles' from which it has separated itself. This body is called to become a body by growing upwards, into Christ, who himself comes down to us from the God and Father of all. The 'all of us' who are called to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God cannot, finally, be smaller in scope than the 'all' who have God as Father. And the truth that the members of the body are called to see and speak is the truth of how this whole family of God might live as one in Christ. The members of Christ's body are therefore called to grow to maturity as members of a family without boundaries: a truly universal community of all the children of God. Christian learning is therefore learning against a horizon of hope: hope of the salvation, the inclusion in this learning community, of the whole of God's family.

'Learning Christ' therefore includes within it learning to understand each other. It involves an on-going commitment to learn together, giving and receiving from each other deeper understanding of the possibilities for just, holy and loving life together.

It is because learning has this goal and shape that learners must have a particular character.

> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
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> Ephesians 4:1–3
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> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil…. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear…. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.
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> Ephesians 4: 25–27, 29, 31–2

Given the nature of the learning to which the members of the Body of Christ are called, these characteristics, the fruit of the Spirit who is leading them into maturity, are necessary features of their life. Without these fruits, there can be no real learning: no reception of the

gift of truth from others, no seeing past the filters of one's own desires, no discovery of ways to live together beyond factionalism. They are the characteristics of a learning life: learning demands holiness, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Learning Christ and University Learning

The gap between this theological vision of learning and learning as the business of universities (including avowedly secular universities) may seem large, but we can narrow it quite quickly.

To narrow the gap from the theological side, we can note that 'learning Christ' as set out in Ephesians must include all kinds of learning. The God of whom Ephesians speaks is the 'one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all'. This God is creator of the heavens and the earth, and so it is not just the whole human family but the whole community of God's creation, the whole community that waits for redemption with eager longing, that is called into flourishing life together. Christians are called to live well with their fellow human beings, with the wider circle of non-human animals, as participants in the ecology of all living things, and as parts of God's material creation. The understanding that can be darkened or enlightened, that is transformed on the way of the cross and of resurrection, and that is involved in 'learning Christ', therefore includes the understanding of any object whatsoever, if understanding

that object can affect how the learner lives in the world as God's creature. It includes *any* learning that can shape learners' understanding of the possibilities for or constraints upon their life in the world.

To narrow the gap from the university side, one need simply note that university learning does indeed shape learners' ways of inhabiting the world, and their ways of living together, and that at least some of the forms of learning pursued in a university allow for the present projects and expectations of learners to be interrupted, complicated, or derailed by what they learn. Where learning like this takes place, there is at least a possibility that learning can undercut gratification. To put it another way: the gap is narrowed just to the extent that universities are institutions concerned not simply with what is useful but with what is true (even if their concern is primarily with what is useful because it is true).

Of course, the name 'university' has always named a variety of kinds of institution, and that variety has increased in recent decades. Universities speak about their learning, and pursue it, in a wide variety of ways. My claim about the proximity of learning Christ and university learning can cut through much of this diversity, however. It works with any university just insofar as its students are led to engage, alongside staff, in constructing, testing, and refining patterns of

understanding by engaging with the realities that those patterns purport to describe. And it works just to the extent that they are interested in exploring, by means of this constructing, testing and refining of patterns of understanding, how we might live well with the objects of our inquiries.

University learning that allows this kind of engagement will tend to be characterised by the following features. First, the objects of its learning will seldom be done with. They will become the focuses of on-going exploration in which new possibilities of response are proposed, tested, refined, abandoned, replaced, and supplemented. Learners will go on examining the patterns of language and practice with which they surround these object, and by which they demarcate it as an object of study in the first place, and they will ask what forms of engagement they enable and what forms they obscure. And at least some of the time they will ask whose interests are involved in these patterns of language and practice.

The gap will be at its narrowest wherever it is recognised that the possibilities of 'living with' and 'responding to' the objects of our learning are not reducible to consumption or exploitation. University learning that allows the objects of study to question and disrupt existing projects needs to be open to a wider range of possibilities – to relationships with those objects that can include wonder and lament as

well as use, and that can together take the form of wisdom (see Higton 2013).

This idea that university learning has to do with exploring the possibilities of life in the world might seem, at first sight, most clearly applicable wherever universities are concerned with objects of study directly ingredient in that life. It is easier to talk this way about investigation of the role of tree planting in the regulation of floodplains or the impact of foreign aid on commodity prices, than it is when universities are investigating the properties of gauge bosons, algebraic number theory, or the folding of cytoskeletal proteins – but one can still think of all of these forms of learning together as bound up in our inhabitation of the world and exploration of its possibilities, however limited a role might be played within that by specific domains of inquiry.

The gap between my theological account of learning and university learning is likely to look smallest, however, when the 'objects' of our investigation are animals, especially human animals, and the question about how we appropriately live with and respond to them has becomes the question of how we can live together. The questions asked in universities about the patterns of language and practice by which we navigate our relationships with others can then (at least in principle) become questions about the justice those patterns

do to the needs, experience, and integrity of other persons. We attend to the ways in which they appear (or have been made to disappear) within the discourses that shape our world, and we experiment with and test ways of making sense that we hope will do more justice.

My claim is that whenever it can plausibly be thought of as involving this kind of labour on the ways in which we live in and with the world, university learning stands on terrain that, from a Christian theological point of view, is included in 'learning Christ'. At its best, the learning that takes place in universities may therefore contribute, in however limited a way, to the task of learning to live together in the world as Christ's body, regardless of whether those involved in it understand their learning in these terms. Of course, that qualifier 'at its best' is necessary, because nothing I have said requires that university learning will automatically lead to holy and righteous possibilities of living. My claim is certainly not that such university learning inherently or pervasively makes a positive contribution to learning Christ. Even if some of the forms of learning pursued in university settings look like they might contribute to flourishing life together, others might promote ways of living with creation, or of relating to others, that will look distorted to eyes being trained by the gospel, and there may be nothing in the resources of the university itself that can determine which of these possibilities will be realised. And if we ask at

the broadest level about the visions of the common good, the political telos that is avowed by university learners or implied in their practice, we might well find it difficult to make positive connections between most universities and a Christian vision of learning, and may even be tempted to portray some grand philosophical opposition between them. At a lower level, however, the level at which university learners engage with particular objects of study by means of specific forms of diligence and disciplined attention, the connections between this learning and 'learning Christ' will be more complex, and potentially more positive.

My claim is not that Christian learning must build on university learning, nor that university learning can prepare for or produce Christian learning. I am not, in fact, claiming that there is any kind of systematic relationship between them. It is simply that, insofar as university learning explores the possibilities of life in the world, it is exploring territory that a Christian will see as relevant to 'learning Christ', and that it therefore makes sense for a Christian learner (a 'disciple') to interrogate university learning in the light of a Christian vision of learning. Learning Christ and university learning are not incommensurable realities.

Virtue in the University

When I set out a theological vision of learning above, I finished by arguing that the fruit of the Spirit are necessary features of learning. Without them, there can be no real learning; they are the characteristics of a learning life. People learn well by becoming those who learn with humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, honesty, kindness, forgiveness, and the moderation of anger.

One simple effect of examining university learning in the light of this theological vision, therefore, is to highlight the role that these fruit might play – *must* play – in university life. In itself, this is not a particularly striking move, despite the fact that references to the fruit of the Spirit are predictably sparse in secular discussions of Higher Education policy and practice. References to 'virtue', which covers at least some of the same territory, *are* widespread. The term 'virtue' is not, of course, identical to the term 'fruit of the Spirit', but it still directs our attention to the deep dispositions of the learner that enable and shape learning. At its most neutral, of course, the term 'virtue' simply names the internalisation by students and staff of the standards of excellence appropriate to the practices pursued in university: learning, teaching, and research. Normally, however, it is given a more decidedly ethical cast: it is used to talk about these internalised standards insofar as they are constituents of a good human life, or

insofar as the practices they govern are contributions to the common good.

It is not uncommon, then, to see university learning presented as a matter of virtue, and the university itself as a school of virtue, even if the accounts of virtue involved vary widely (see, for example, Nixon 2008; Koetzee 2014.) University learning is seen to involve the disciplining of our existing patterns of thinking by engagement with the reality they purport to describe. Such disciplining of our thinking demands attentiveness of us; it demands that we be open to surprise, with a readiness to notice facets of that reality that do not fit our expectations. It involves the patience required to allow those facets to emerge. It requires the honesty to admit the challenges created by these surprises for our existing thinking, the integrity to trace their implications as far as necessary through the whole pattern of that thinking, and the clarity that makes the tracing of those connections possible. It involves the humility involved both in admitting that changes to our thinking are necessary and in the communication of those changes. At times it requires the courage to admit that one has been wrong. Yet it also involves confidence in what one has learnt, and the willingness to trust the findings to which disciplined investigation has led one, even when that means contradicting others.

It is also unexceptional to suggest that learning involves the formation of communities within which these virtues are formed and sustained. University learning involves patterns of relationship within which certain kinds of give and take, certain kinds of mutual affirmation and critique, are enabled and encouraged. Participation in such a community involves taking responsibility for one's contribution, responding to critiques of that contribution, and offering criticism in turn. It involves the maintenance of certain patterns of civility: the maintenance of conventions that permit and facilitate exchange.

None of these claims is unusual in the literature on Higher Education, nor in the language of universities themselves, even where the term 'virtue' does not itself appear. Universities often speak about academic good conduct, where that covers everything from the acknowledgement of sources and the avoidance of misquotation to standards of clarity and proof. Most universities speak about these matters in ethical terms, and many connect them to the inherent nature of learning. Oxford University, for instance, provides the following guidance on plagiarism:

> Plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. It is a principle of intellectual honesty that all members of the academic community should acknowledge their debt to the originators of

> the ideas, words, and data which form the basis for their own work. Passing off another's work as your own is not only poor scholarship, but also means that you have failed to complete the learning process.
>
> … You are not necessarily expected to become an original thinker, but you are expected to be an independent one – by learning to assess critically the work of others, weigh up differing arguments and draw your own conclusions. Students who plagiarise undermine the ethos of academic scholarship while avoiding an essential part of the learning process. (University of Oxford 2015)

Similarly, it is not at all unusual to find standards of behaviour in research being overseen by ethics committees, or to find research conduct discussed in ethical terms. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), for instance, insists that the 'seven principles of public life' (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership) are essential to the work of research

assessment, and includes discussion of them in training for members of its Peer Review College (AHRC 2015).[1]

There is, of course, plenty of scope for criticism of the ways in which these ideas are articulated, and of the forms of education and of scrutiny by which the virtues named are supposedly inculcated, just as there is plenty of scope for negative judgments about the actual display of these virtues in academic life. There is, nevertheless, much here that can be affirmed from a theological point of view. Christians can broadly agree with many others that the universities we need have to be virtuous universities, because learning demands of learners patient and disciplined engagement with the world and honest and open engagement with one another.

Can Virtue Be Taught?

From a theological point of view, then, there is a certain proximity between university learning and 'learning Christ', and the theologian's interest in the role of the fruit of the Spirit in learning is matched by an interest on the university side in the virtues necessary to learning. Christian observers of and participants in university life should have a particular interest in this dimension of university

[1] These are the 'Nolan Principles', published in 1995 by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

learning. They should be amongst those taking seriously the description of university learning as a matter of formation in virtue, in ways that go beyond the formalities of 'academic good conduct' and compliance with codes of ethics.

Looking at the university with theological eyes, however, will involve more than a simple affirmation of existing ways of speaking about and pursuing the formation of educational virtues. Within a theological vision, the learning pursued in universities, and the virtues developed in that pursuit, are situated within a broader narrative. They are good to the extent that they can be contributions to the deep transformation of the self from gratification to righteousness, and contributions to the formation of the just and loving community of all God's children.

Because they see the development of the virtues necessary to learning as, potentially, a limited but real contribution to the deep transformation of the self, Christians may be particularly aware of some of the difficulties involved. 'Quarry the granite rock with razors,' said John Henry Newman, 'or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man' (Newman 1976: p.111). After all, the

possibility of teaching virtue has been called into question since at least the time of Socrates.

In part, this question has to do with the futility of the direct teaching of virtue. After all, teaching *about* virtue does not inculcate it, and there are good reasons to be sceptical about the value of direct attempts to train university students and staff in virtue. A focus on distinct ethics courses, or on the provision of ever more comprehensive information about good practice is very unlikely to be the main yield of a serious focus on virtue. Even a cursory glance at the theological and philosophical literature on virtue is enough to suggest that the focus is far more likely to fall on teachers and mentors *modelling*, habitually and attractively, the forms of attentiveness, openness and integrity, that their disciplines demand, and drawing – or seeking to draw – their students into the community of those for whom these virtues have become second nature. Virtues are, it seems, best caught by imitation and repetition, by involvement in a community for which they have become second nature. A Christian concern with virtue in universities might, therefore, take the form of a concern with the kinds of apprenticeship in virtuous learning that the university provides, and with the dynamics of classrooms and labs as communities of apprenticeship. The universities we need are schools of apprenticeship:

contexts for the formation of relationships that allow for imitation of the habits of attentiveness and communication that constitute learning.

There is another aspect to the difficulty of teaching virtue, however, which goes rather deeper. Virtue cannot be taught, the argument goes, because to learn virtue requires that one already recognise and value it, and that in turn requires one to have already internalised the virtue that one is supposed to be learning. In reality, of course, the patterns of learning can be rather more complex than this criticism suggests. One can imagine, for instance, someone motivated by a thoroughly instrumental desire for some of the extrinsic goods made possible by a university education (salary enhancement, say), and diligently pursuing his or her studies only for the sake of those goods – and yet getting caught up in the process of study almost despite themselves, and beginning to value it for its own sake. Such a person might well learn the intellectual virtues necessary for their studies, and come in time to internalise them so that they became second nature, and properly deserving of the name 'virtue'.

Nevertheless, the claim that virtue cannot be taught to the unvirtuous rightly suggests that universities as putative schools of virtue cannot be considered in isolation from other contexts of virtuous learning. Students arrive at university already formed in many ways (in families, schools, churches, as participants in and consumers of

popular culture, and so on); they are normally at university for only a short period of time. As Stanley Hauerwas (2007) has argued, a society therefore tends to get the universities that it deserves: the formation provided by a university can only be sustainable and effective if it is one that those in the society surrounding it are able to value. Universities can only provide formation that makes sense within those broader patterns of moral education that shape that society. A Christian concern with virtue in universities might therefore take the form of a concern with the connections between the university and the wider society, and even though there is no good reason to think that the wider society will be unvaryingly inimical to the possibility of true learning, that concern might include a particular focus on the kinds of moral formation outside the university that undermine the possibility of good work within it, and on the possibilities within university life for resisting and undoing them. Just as theologians have asked about the counter-cultural possibilities of Christian liturgies over against the malformation provided by the quasi-liturgies of consumerism (for instance), so a Christian concerned with virtue in a university setting might ask whether here too there might be, in however secondary and limited a sense, liturgies of formation strong enough to keep the space for true learning open. The universities we need will be contexts for the formation of deep habits of attentiveness and communication, and

such formation will be a matter of the whole performance, display and ritual of university life.

There can, after all, be a specificity to the education in virtue provided by universities, precisely because virtues can take domain-specific forms. It is possible to be habitually honest in one domain and not in another, habitually attentive in one domain and not in another, habitually to show integrity of one kind but not of another. That is not to say that the various domain-specific forms of honesty, say, are completely independent – and it might therefore be sensible to ask serious questions about the academic honesty of someone who had proved thoroughly dishonest in some other context – but formation in virtue might indeed turn out to be a complex patchwork affair rather than a coherent whole. That should certainly make us wary of any claims that university learning will inherently have some wider moralising effect, beyond forming students in the virtues necessary for that learning itself, but it does also suggest that specific forms of virtuous behaviour may be kept alive in a university, by the momentum of its own particular practices, in ways that are effectively counter-cultural. Academic communities might be communities of virtue in ways that do not reflect, and might even resist, wider societal patterns – even if only in limited ways. A Christian concern with virtue in

universities might take the form of an interest in these counter-cultural possibilities that university learning can provide.

Negotiating Virtue

All of these suggestions, however, could leave a problematic picture in place. They could reinforce the assumption that the shape of the virtuous practices necessary for university learning to flourish is clear, that Christians have (either uniquely, or alongside others) a secure grasp of that shape, and that their task is therefore simply one of the preservation or promotion of something that they possess. Yet in the theological vision with which I began, the fruits of the Spirit were the dispositions necessary for an on-going exchange, in which the members of the body keep on giving and receiving from one another new understanding of the possibilities for living together – in which they keep on *learning* the nature of the life to which they are called. The life discovered in these exchanges is, I said, one that no individual or faction owns, and that comes to them all (and keeps coming to them all) as a gift from above. It involves an unending reception of understanding from others, and through them from Christ, rather than the possession of a perspective from which to see and judge all. To promote such a life by acting as guardians of a conception of virtue already securely possessed would involve a performative contradiction – and it might be better to think that one of the roles that Christian

participants could play in university life would be to be visibly *teachable*.

Rather than thinking of, say, 'openness' as a virtue that is already securely identified, that can be preserved or promoted by means of appropriate vigilance, we should instead think of it as a vague term that is concretely, repeatedly and diversely specified in particular proposals and counter-proposals for patterns of university life. We should think of it as a site for on-going negotiation, and therefore as a site for on-going learning. We already know something of what it means to be open, and to be formed for openness, but we do not yet know all that openness can and should mean. After all, I argued above that the openness proper to learning has as its horizon the whole human family learning together.

This vision of an on-going mutual adjustment finds its echoes in the life of contemporary universities. They are often locations where the openness or inclusivity of learning is a matter of intense and difficult negotiation. Universities are often depicted in the press and elsewhere as seedbeds of 'political correctness', but that normally means no more than that they are sites for the sometimes awkward, sometimes heated attempt to identify the forms of exclusion prevalent in our society and mirrored in our society's universities, and to track down the roots those forms of exclusion through all our practices and

our language. Such negotiation – genuinely difficult, genuinely contested, and inherently resistant to resolution by simple appeals to supposed common sense – is not a distraction from the proper business of universities, but an inevitable and proper accompaniment to learning. It is a symptom of the on-going exploration of the nature of one of the core virtues proper to learning.

One could look, therefore, at recent debates about the 'no platforming' of controversial speakers, the removal from college facades of statues of infamous figures from the colonial past, the proper approach to avoiding offensive stereotypes in student celebrations, or the need for trigger warnings before lectures that include sensitive content, and so on. The existence and fierceness of these debates are not signs of some fundamental breakdown in university life, still less of some easily dismissed immaturity on the part of students. They are evidence of the on-going, complex negotiation of the openness of the university learning community. They are new forms of fundamental and perennial questions facing universities, precisely about the kind of moral formation they demand and provide – and those perennial questions can *always* throw up new forms.

Precisely the patterns of virtuous behaviour on which the academic community has collectively settled can turn out, in

subsequent negotiations, to be or to have become forms of viciousness that need to be overcome. The forms of civility that permit and facilitate exchange, for instance, can be masks for very uneven distributions of power. They can all too easily serve to mute challenges that ought to be heard. Even the call for clarity as an intellectual virtue can be problematic in some contexts, where the language of learning has evolved as a home for those in power, and where those excluded from power are also excluded from the sense of easy familiarity, the sense of being at home in the language, that common forms of clarity demand.

The theological vision of learning that I have outlined certainly encourages a deep concern with universities as schools of virtue, with the forms of apprenticeship that they provide, and with their connection with other patterns of moral formation in society. It should not, however, promote a concern that is predominantly conservative, still less nostalgic in tone. The universities that we need will be homes to an on-going negotiation of patterns of practice and formation, in which participants go on learning from one another, and from those not yet included, what virtue can and should look like. For Christian participants, there will certainly be a constant return to the gospel of Jesus Christ to test, challenge, and refine what is being learnt – the fundamental form of learning is, after all, 'learning Christ' – but

Christians can expect to discover more of that gospel in the light of the understanding they receive as a gift from others.

In other words, participants in the universities we need will recognise that they, their disciplines, and their institutions are *not yet* virtuous, and that they do not yet know in full what virtuous learning will involve. They will recognise that there are new habits of attentiveness, of openness, and of critique to learn, and they will expect to go on learning them from others, and to be weaned, in the process, from habits of thought and action that they had hitherto thought to be good.

For universities to be seats of learning they must be schools of virtue. To be schools of virtue, however, includes being places where our grasp of virtue is explored, challenged and revised. The universities that we need are not reservations in which the virtues of an imagined golden age are preserved, nor clubs within which a well understood rulebook of virtuous practices is enforced. They are sites for contestation and discovery, for the restless expansion of the community of enquiry, and for the on-going transformation of the habits of engagement and communication that make true learning possible.

AHRC, (2015), 'The Seven Principles of Public Life.' [online] Available at: http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/about/policies/sevenprinciplesofpubliclife/ [accessed 5 January 2016].

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